

Urban Center Zone

Frequently Asked Questions



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Planning & Development Services
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The following is a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) related to development in the Urban Center (UC) zone.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q: What is an urban center?

A: Urban centers are compact, well-designed areas that concentrate a variety of land uses in one place. Urban centers are people-oriented living and working places that allow residents to walk to shops and high capacity transit stations. The County Council (Council) has designated Urban Centers on the Snohomish County Future Land Use Map (FLUM) where significant population and employment growth can be located, a community-wide focal point can be provided, and the increased use of transit, bicycling, and walking can be supported. Snohomish County has designated seven urban centers, all located in the unincorporated Southwest Urban Growth Area. The implementing zoning for these seven urban centers is UC.

- I-5/164th St
- I-5/128th St
- SR 527/196th St
- SR 99/152nd St
- I-5/44th Ave W
- SR 99/SR 525

Q: Are there local examples of urban center development?

A: The following developments were constructed under the county's Urban Center regulations:

- Newberry Square (west of the Ash Way park and ride lot located north of 164th St)
- Vintage (north of the Ash Way park and ride lots located north of 164th St)
- Oak Heights (north of the Vintage urban center project)
- Avalon Alderwood (southeast corner of 164th St and Alderwood Mall Blvd)
- Martha Lake Town Center (southwest corner of 164th St and Larch Way)
- Prestonwood (1726 165th Place SW, Lynnwood)
- Nichorwynd (15503 18th Avenue W, Lynnwood)
- Esplanade (148th Street and Seattle Hill Road)
- Zocalo (201st Place and Bothell-Everett Highway)

Other examples within cities include:

- Mill Creek Town Center (Mill Creek)
- Village Center (Mukilteo)
- Village Commons (Stanwood)
- Juanita Village (Kirkland)
- Redmond Town Center (Redmond)
- University Village (Seattle)
- Kent Station (Kent)

Q: What is Floor Area Ratio or FAR?

A: Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is a measure often used to determine the intensity of land use and provides a measurement of the maximum amount of building that may be constructed on a site. It is similar to dwelling units per acre which is how the density of residential development is often expressed. The definition of FAR is found in SCC 30.91F.445:

30.91F.445 "Floor Area Ratio" means the net building area divided by the net site area.

Floor Area Ratio = Net building area / Net site area

30.91B.222 Building area, net ("Net building area") means the total square feet of floor space in a building, excluding areas below finished grade, space dedicated to parking, mechanical spaces, elevator and stair shafts, lobbies and common spaces including atriums.

30.91S.355 Site area, net ("Net site area") means the gross area of a site in square feet excluding critical areas and required buffers.

A higher FAR signifies a higher intensity of land use, and a lower FAR likewise signifies a lower intensity of land use. FAR is increased as the building occupies a greater portion of the parcel, or when additional floors are added. Specifications about how tall a building is, its shape or how it looks are addressed through site and architectural standards.

ZONING

Q: When did the rezone to UC zoning become effective?

A: A county initiated area-wide rezone went into effect May 29, 2010, through Ordinance No. 09-080. Properties designated as an urban center on the FLUM were rezoned to the UC zone to be consistent with and implement urban center policies in the Snohomish County comprehensive plan.

Q: Can my property be rezoned from the UC zone to a different zone?

A: The UC zoning classification is the only implementing zone for properties designated Urban Center on the FLUM. In order to rezone property from the UC zone, a property owner would need to file a docket application (Bulletin #5) to request a change in the FLUM designation and zoning classification.

PERMITTED USES

Q: What uses are permitted in the UC zone?

A: In general, a wide range of retail, office, multiple family residential, civic, and medical uses compatible with transit and pedestrian-oriented development are permitted. The specific list of permitted uses is found in SCC 30.22.100. Some uses are limited to only those legally existing as of May 29, 2010.

Q: Is mini-self storage permitted in the UC zone?

A: Mini-self storage is not permitted in the UC zone.

Q: Are drive-through facilities permitted in the UC zone?

A: Drive through facilities are permitted subject to the regulations in SCC 30.34A.105.

Q: Can a cell tower be constructed in the UC zone?

A: Pursuant to SCC 30.22.130(119), only a building mounted personal wireless communication facility (cell tower) shall be permitted. No freestanding personal wireless communication facility is permitted.

Q: Is outdoor storage allowed in the UC zone?

A: Products or merchandise offered for sale or storage by a business may be located outdoors. Outdoor storage is limited to 500 square feet and it must not block sidewalks from being used by the public.

NON-CONFORMITY

Q: What is the affect of the UC zone regulations on existing uses?

A: If an existing use or structure is no longer permitted in the UC zone, then the use is non-conforming to current regulations. Non-conforming uses and structures are subject to the provisions in SCC 30.28.070, 30.28.072, and 30.28.075. Otherwise, all new and re-development must comply with SCC Chapter 30.34A, unless specifically exempted.

Q: Can I expand or make improvements to a non-conforming use in the UC zone?

A: Please consult SCC 30.22.040, 30.28.072 and 30.28.075 for more information.

DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Q: What are the specific regulations that guide development in the UC zone?

A: New and re-development in the UC zone must comply with Chapter 30.34A SCC and any other applicable chapters in SCC Title 30 unless the activity is specifically exempted. These regulations govern bulk requirements (such as height and setbacks), the layout of the development (landscaping and on-site circulation), and architectural standards (how the building looks).

Q: What development is exempt from SCC Chapter 30.34A requirements?

A: Per SCC 30.34A.010, the following activities are not subject to the urban center development regulations contained in SCC Chapter 30.34A. Exempted developments shall comply with all other applicable provisions contained in SCC Title 30 (i.e. landscaping, parking, signs, etc.); any applicable environmental regulations (i.e. critical areas and drainage); and applicable building codes. Service stations shall comply with the Planned Community Business regulations.

- Personal wireless communication facility.
- Non-conforming uses
- Service stations constructed prior to May 29, 2010

Q: What is the maximum building height allowed?

A: The regulations allow buildings up to 90 feet in height (~9 stories). An additional 35 feet in height (~3 stories) may be allowed when the project is located within 1/8 mile of a transit center, major transit route or high capacity transit station. New buildings or portions of new buildings that are located within 90 feet of R-9600, R-8400, R-7200, T or LDMR shall be scaled down and limited in building height to a height that represents half the distance to building or that portion of the building is located from the R-9600, R-8400, R-7200, T or LDMR zoning line.

Q: What is are the setbacks and lot coverage in the UC zone?

A: The front, rear and side yard setbacks are zero. There is no lot coverage for the UC zone.

Q: How does FAR work?

A: FAR is used to determine the amount of gross floor that can be constructed on a given piece of property. To calculate the gross floor area, the variables in the FAR definition are re-arranged as follows:

$$\text{Floor Area Ratio} \times \text{Net Site Area} = \text{Approximate Building Area (not including those areas excluded under the definition of FAR)}$$

The allowable FAR in the UC zone is found in SCC Table 30.34A.030(1). The table establishes minimum and maximum FAR's for mixed-use and all other development in the UC zone. Additional square footage is permitted through the use of bonuses.

Allowed Floor to Area Ratios

Type of Development Proposed	Minimum	Maximum	Maximum allowable with bonus
Mixed Use	0.5	1.0	3.75
All other development	0.5	0.75	2.50

Mixed use development is defined as:

- Four or more buildings where at least two of the buildings contain residential uses only and two of the buildings contain non-residential uses only
- Three or less buildings in which the entire first floor of at least one of the proposed buildings is devoted to non-residential uses.

Q: Is there a minimum FAR required in the UC zone?

A: Single use residential or non-residential development must meet the minimum FAR established in SCC Table 30.34A.030(1). The same formula used to calculate gross floor area is also used to determine the approximate minimum amount of floor area that is required to be constructed. As an example, for a one-acre property (43,560 square feet) proposing only apartments, the minimum square footage that must be built would be 21,780 square feet. The calculation is as follows:

$$0.5 \times 43,560 = \underline{21,780} \text{ square feet (Approximate minimum building size)}$$

Q: How do the FAR bonuses work?

A: If an applicant wishes to increase to square footage above the maximum allowed outright for a development, one or more bonuses listed in SCC Table 30.34A.035(1) must be proposed. The bonuses permit additional floor area up to the maximum allowed under SCC Table 30.34A.030(1) in exchange for providing a feature that will benefit the development or community.

Table 30.34A.035(1)
Floor Area Ratio Bonuses

Feature	Additional Floor Area for Each Feature
Above or Below Grade Structured Parking	0.5 FAR for over 75% of required parking contained in structure
	0.25 FAR for 50% to 75% of required parking

	contained in a structure
Affordable housing	5 ft ² of floor area for each ft ² of affordable housing
Community gardens for use by residents	10 ft ² of floor area for each ft ² of community garden
Covered Civic Space	5 ft ² of floor area for each ft ² of covered civic space
Daycare	5 ft ² of floor area for each ft ² of daycare
Green roof	5 ft ² of floor area for each ft ² of green roof
One percent of total construction cost for public art*	0.2 FAR with an additional 0.2 FAR for each one percent of the total construction cost for public art
Rooftop Solar Panels	10 ft ² of floor area for each ft ² of solar panel
One Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) credit.	10,000 ft ² for each TDR credit from farmland or 5,000 ft ² for each TDR credit from land use designations other than farmland

*Public art is defined as a fountain, sculpture, painting, mural, or similar object that is sited within a planned development as a focal point and is intended for the enjoyment of the general public. It does not contain characteristics of an advertising sign or identify or draw attention to a business.

Q: Can an existing single family detached dwelling be converted to other uses in the UC zone?

A: An existing single family detached dwelling can be converted to another use provided that the use is allowed in the UC zone and changes to the structure complies with the urban center development regulations contained in SCC Chapter 30.34A.

Q: Can an existing commercial building in the UC zone be remodeled and what are the applicable development regulations?

A: Remodeling of an existing commercial structure is permitted under SCC 30.34A.025. Remodels require the submittal of commercial building permit and are approved administratively.

Q: Can an existing commercial building in the UC zone with a permitted use be expanded?

A: Minor expansions of an existing structure containing a permitted use is allowed under SCC 30.34A.026. Minor expansions require the submittal of commercial building permit and are approved administratively. Applicants are not required to schedule a pre-application conference or hold a pre-application design review board meeting. Applicants must schedule a schedule a 30.66B Presubmittal meeting and obtain a 30.66B Presubmittal form.

SIGNS

Q: Are there regulations for signs in the UC zone?

A: Specific UC zone sign regulations are listed in SCC 30.27.047. Unless permitted before May 29, 2010, new electronic reader boards and signs which include flashing, chasing, moving, or animation are prohibited per SCC 30.34A.047(2).

For more information on commercial signs please refer to the following links:

- [Application](#)
- [Applicant's Guide - Commercial Sign Applications](#)
- [Signs Submittal Checklist](#)

PARKING

Q: Are there regulations for parking in the UC zone?

A: Specific UC zone parking regulations are listed in SCC 30.26.032 and 30.34A.095.

LANDSCAPING

Q: Are there regulations for landscaping in the UC zone?

A: Specific UC zone landscaping regulations are listed in SCC 30.25.031.

Q: Is there a requirement for a perimeter landscaping buffer in the UC zone?

A: Pursuant to SCC 30.25.031 a perimeter landscaping buffer is required when the development abuts R-9600, R-8400, R-7200, T or LDMR zoning.

APPLICATION SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

Q: What are the submittal requirements for an urban center development application?

A: All applications shall contain the items on the *Urban Center Development Submittal Checklist* available from PDS or may be accessed from the web at:

<http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us/documents/Departments/PDS/Checklists/UrbanCenterSubmittalChecklist.pdf>

Q: Is a neighborhood meeting required to submit an urban center development application?

A: A pre-application application design review board public meeting is required 30 days prior to the submittal of an urban center development application (*Note: a pre-application design review board public meeting is not required for minor development activities, expansion of an existing structure containing a permitted use, and development applications less than 12,000 square feet of gross floor area or 60 dwelling units*). The purpose of the public meeting is to ensure that neighbors, adjacent municipalities, transit, special purpose districts, agencies (federal or state), tribes and business owners have an overview of the proposed development and learn how it might affect them and to work with the applicant to resolve any concerns prior to submittal. It also allows a design review board established pursuant to SCC 30.34A.175 to provide early feedback on the design of the project. The requirements for the neighborhood meeting include:

- Applicant responsible for notifying the meeting
- Holding it to the extent possible near the proposed development
- Providing information depicting the proposed development including development details (size, mix of land uses, FAR, building heights, etc.) and conceptual site plan and building illustrations

More information on the pre-application design review board public meeting can be found in SCC 30.34A.165.

Q: What is the urban center design review board?

A: The urban center design review board (Board) shall serve as advisors on urban center development applications. The Board provides written comments on a development to the applicant. The Board is made up of five individuals nominated by the Snohomish County Executive and confirmed by the Council.

Q: What are duties of the Board?

A: The duties of the Board include:

- Holding an open public meeting with the applicant of the proposed urban center development, neighbors, adjacent city and/or town, utility service providers, transit and County staff in attendance
- Reviewing and discussing proposed site plans and development design
- Providing written recommendations to applicant on potential modifications regarding the development, such as: scale, density, design, building mass, and proposed uses of the development
- Synthesizing community input on design concerns
- Providing early design guidance to the development team and community
- Ensuring fair and consistent application of the design standards of chapter 30.34A SCC

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Q: What is the review process for an urban center development application?

A: The review process for approving an urban center development is found in SCC 30.34A.180. There are four categories of development as shown in the table along with the approval authority. A pre-application meeting and pre-application design review board public meeting may be required.

Category	Approval Authority	Pre-Application Meeting (SCC 30.34A.163)	Pre-Application Design Review Board Public Meeting (SCC 30.34A.165)	Appeals
Minor development activities (SCC 30.34A.025)	Administrative	No	No	Hearing Examiner
Expansion of an existing structure containing a permitted use (SCC 30.34A.026)	Administrative	No	No	Hearing Examiner
Development applications for less than 12,000 ft ² of gross floor area or 60 dwelling units	Hearing Examiner	Yes	No	County Council
All other development	Hearing Examiner	Yes	Yes	County Council

For “All other development” following the public comment period, at least one meeting shall be held with the county, city/town and developer to review comments on the application.

Q: What is the purpose of the meeting between the county, city/town and developer?

A: The meeting allows the county, city/town who may annex the project and developer to review all comments submitted and to determine which ones will be reflected in the application. Any changes agreed to by the department, city/town and application must be consistent with county code and will become conditions of approval for the development. The city/town and the applicant may mutually agree in writing to waive this meeting requirement.

TRANSPORTATION/TRANSIT

Q: What is a Transportation Demand Management Plan?

A: SCC 30.34A.080(9) requires that an applicant provide Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures. The measures must have the potential for reducing the developments peak hour trips by 5%. A TDM plan is required at the time of submittal. For more information on TDM see SCC 30.66B.610 through SCC 30.66B.680.

OTHER

Q: Where can I get additional information on developing in the UC zone?

A: For additional questions, please call David Killingstad at 425-388-3311 ext. 2215 or by email at david.killingstad@snoco.org. Copies of the Urban Center Development Submittal Checklist and other required forms are available via the PDS Land Use Forms web page.

http://www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Divisions/Permitting/land_use_forms.htm